

VZCZCXRO3935
RR RUEHAG RUEHROV
DE RUEHHE #0003 0031240
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 031240Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3979
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 0063

C O N F I D E N T I A L HELSINKI 000003

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/03/2018

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SUBJECT: FINNISH RESPONSE - SUPPORTING ASPIRATIONS OF THE SYRIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL

REF: SECSTATE 171106

Classified By: POLCHIEF GREG THOME FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D)

(C) PolChief delivered subject demarche to MFA Office Director for the Middle East Eija Rotinen January 3. Rotinen welcomed the information we had to share regarding the Damascus Declaration National Council. Very few groups have had success in promoting peaceful democratic reforms in Syria, she said, and any dissidents brave enough to press for such change should be applauded and encouraged. Finland continues to support EU efforts to urge the Government of Syria to respect human rights and to release political prisoners. The GOF has also made these positions clear in past bilateral meetings, Rotinen noted. She could not commit, at this point, to a unilateral GOF statement in support and predicted that if Finland made a public statement of support it would be in the EU context. However, she said she would recommend some statement of support, noting that it "should be in our common interest" to support such a group.

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